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ABSTRACT

These three brochures are short guides to show how parents, schools, and communities can support family involvement in education and help build a better educational environment. Noting that communities that support schools and families are better places to live, work, and learn, The "Join Together for Kids" brochure provides information on how to build a community partnership for learning, and on what the community can do to support schools and family involvement in education. The "Get Involved!" brochure shows how parents and families can help their children do better in school, by reading together, using TV wisely, establishing a daily family routine with scheduled homework time, talking to your children and teenagers, expressing high expectations for children by enrolling them in challenging courses, keeping in touch with the school, and using community resources. The "Team Up For Kids!" brochure points out that when schools and families team up to help children learn, everyone wins. This brochure also provides information on how schools can support family involvement in education. (AP)

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ED 389 412

JOIN TOGETHER FOR KIDS!

How Communities Can Support Family Involvement in Education

RS 023710

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Family Involvement Partnership for Learning

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WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY CAN DO TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Combat alcohol, drugs, and violence

These problems threaten children's chances for success in far too many of our communities. Prevention programs work best when parents, students, schools, law enforcement officials, and communities join together to fight back. For example, schools and community members can provide mentoring and after-school programs to give children safe havens from violence and alternatives to drugs. Communities can also put students on the right path by providing a quality education and school-to-work programs that lead to college, technical training, or good jobs after high school. *A future filled with hope and promise is the best answer to the hopelessness of drugs.* Solving drug and safety problems is a difficult task, and each community will have to find its own answers. But when communities unite, real progress can be made.

Teach parenting skills

Programs for parents can include academic classes, literacy training, career preparation, early childhood education, children's health, and assistance in finding helpful services in the community. When adults become involved in parenting education, parent-child communication improves and children with developmental delays in speech, social skills, and other areas overcome these challenges more readily. High-quality parenting programs engage parents early, sometimes even before their child's birth, and focus on the critical early years of a child's development.

A recent study of family literacy found that economically at-risk preschool children whose parents received significant amounts of parenting education performed better on vocabulary tests—an important measure of literacy—than children whose parents received little parenting instruction.

Provide mentor programs

Changes in families and communities have limited the amount of contact many youths have with adults who can offer advice and act as role models. To help fill in the gap, interested citizens—from employers to college students to senior citizens—can participate in mentor programs which can provide emotional support and guidance to young people. Mentors can help with schoolwork, job skill development, career planning, parenting, and the many other challenges that face young people today.

Enlist community volunteers

Many different kinds of community organizations, such as civic groups, men's and women's associations, service clubs, and religious groups can organize support for youngsters. In many communities, senior citizens are putting their experience and expertise to work on behalf of children. Nearly 40 percent of Americans over 60 years of age are now involved in some type of volunteer activity. Volunteers can serve as tutors or teacher aides, work in the library, or help with after-school activities, such as music and story telling. In one school, grandparents served on patrol and as school guards to help keep kids safe.

Offer summer learning programs

Communities can make summer activities available to young people through schools, cultural institutions, park districts, and other public and private agencies. Activities might include programs at recreation centers, science and art museums, libraries, and camping sites. These programs are particularly important for low-income children. With limited access to such learning resources at home as books and computers, low-income children can suffer serious academic losses over the summer. Those months need not become a time for losing ground academically or getting into trouble. With the help of community resources, it can be a time of productive learning.

Support preschool programs

Two examples of community programs that support family involvement are Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). Missouri's Parents as Teachers program operates in every district of the state and works with parents of children up to 3 years of age. HIPPY is for mothers of children aged 4 and 5, and it offers a curriculum and materials to help moms get their children ready for kindergarten. Local parent aides visit families to explain the program and review lessons. PAT and HIPPY have been found to improve children's achievement and adjustment to school.

SUPPORTING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION MAKES GOOD SENSE

Encouraging family involvement is a good way to enhance your community's financial investment in education. If all parents of children aged 1 through 9 spent just one hour a day, five days a week, reading with their children or helping with schoolwork, the total number of learning hours would be in the thousands, maybe even millions. The total dollar value of all that teaching is enormous—and the value to our children is incalculable.

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COMMUNITIES THAT SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES ARE BETTER PLACES TO LIVE, WORK, AND LEARN

All across America, communities are pulling together to strengthen education because they know it's the key to a strong local economy, a good quality of life, and a brighter future for everyone.

For communities, making education better means supporting families and schools. Families are responsible for raising children, of course, and schools are responsible for teaching children. But in these difficult times, schools and parents often can't do the job alone, try as they might. They need to reach out for the help of neighbors and others in their community.

That's where service organizations and agencies, religious groups, volunteer groups, clubs, community leaders, and caring citizens can lend a hand and make a big difference. They can help build a true *"community partnership for learning"*—and make their community a better place to live, work, and learn.

How to build your community partnership for learning

Here's what your community can do:

- *Support greater family involvement in education.* Parents and families can't sit on the sidelines when it comes to their children's education. They need to be personally involved, every day. Parents need to read with children, help with homework, stay in touch with teachers, and participate in school activities.

Research shows that when parents do get more involved, their children get better grades and test scores, graduate from high school at higher rates, have greater enrollment in higher education, and are better behaved. *In all these ways, family involvement in education helps children to grow up to be productive, responsible members of the community.*

- *Support schools.* Community members can serve as mentors and volunteers in school. In addition, communities can offer after-school, summer learning, and recreation programs; locate library and cultural services near to schools; make neighborhoods safer and drug-free; encourage the development of business-school partnerships to create school-to-work programs; support schools' efforts to develop challenging academic standards; and work to improve education in many other ways.

These efforts will be rewarded. Communities that have good schools and better educated residents are almost always safer, more stable communities where businesses and families thrive. And these communities can be magnets for new businesses and jobs.

Children: 20% of our population, 100% of our future

Support the effort to help children learn. Find out what resources are available in your community for young people and help expand them. Get personally involved as a volunteer. For more information about these and other ways you and your neighbors can help support and connect schools and families, just turn the page.

"Communities that work to make education better are communities with bright futures."

— Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education

PLEASE JOIN US!

Greater family involvement in education is supported by the Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, which includes over 100 community, business, family, education, and religious organizations nationwide.

Your group or community is cordially invited to join the Family Involvement Partnership. For information, call one of the partners, the U. S. Department of Education, at 1-800-USA-LEARN. Or write to:

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning
600 Independence Avenue, S. W.
Washington, D. C. 20202-8173

When you write, be sure to include your name, title, organizational affiliation, and address. We'll send you helpful material, including the useful guide, *An Invitation to Your Community: Building Community Partnerships for Learning*. Also, ask us how your community can be a site for one of our monthly satellite town meetings that bring together Americans from around the nation to discuss ways to improve our schools.

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JOIN TOGETHER FOR KIDS!

How Communities Can Support Family Involvement in Education

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GET INVOLVED!

How Parents and Families Can Help Their Children Do Better in School

PS023710

Family Involvement Partnership for Learning

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Read together

Children who read at home with their parents perform better in school. Show your kids how much you value reading by keeping good books, magazines, and newspapers in the house. Let them see you read. Take them on trips to the library and encourage them to get library cards. Let children read to you, and talk about the books. What was the book about? Why did a character act that way? What will he or she do next?

Look for other ways to teach children the magic of language, words, and stories. Tell stories to your children about their families and their culture. Point out words to children wherever you go—to the grocery, to the pharmacy, to the gas station. Encourage your children to write notes to grandparents and other relatives.

Use TV wisely

Academic achievement drops sharply for children who watch more than 10 hours of television a week, or an average of more than two hours a day. Parents can limit the amount of viewing and help children select educational programs. Parents can also watch and discuss shows with their kids. This will help children understand how stories are structured.

Establish a daily family routine with scheduled homework time

Studies show that successful students have parents who create and maintain family routines. Make sure your child goes to school every day. Establish a regular time for homework each afternoon or evening, set aside a quiet, well lit place, and encourage children to study. Routines generally include time performing chores, eating meals together, and going to bed at an established time.

"The American family is the rock on which a solid education can be built. I have seen examples all over this nation where two-parent families, single parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles are providing strong family support for their children to learn. If families teach the love of learning, it can make all the difference in the world to their children."

Richard W. Riley,
U. S. Secretary of Education

Talk to your children and teenagers—and listen to them, too

Talk directly to your children, especially your teenagers, about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and the values you want them to have. Set a good example. And listen to what your children have to say. Such personal talks, however uncomfortable they may make you feel, can save their lives.

Express high expectations for children by enrolling them in challenging courses

You can communicate to your children the importance of setting and meeting challenges in school. Tell your children that working hard and stretching their minds is the only way for them to realize their full potential. Expect and encourage your children to take tough academic courses like geometry, chemistry, computer technology, a second language, art, and advanced occupational courses. Make sure they never settle for doing less than their best.

Find out whether your school has high standards

Your school should have clear, challenging standards for what students should know. For example, what reading, writing, and math skills is your child expected to have by fourth grade? By eighth and twelfth grades? What about history, science, the arts, geography, and other languages? Are responsibility and hard work recognized? If your school doesn't, have high standards, join with teachers, principals, and other parents to set these standards.

Keep in touch with the school

Parents cannot afford to wait for schools to tell them how children are doing. Families who stay informed about their children's progress at school have higher-achieving children. To keep informed, parents can visit the school or talk with teachers on the telephone. Get to know the names of your children's teachers, principals, and counselors.

Parents can also work with schools to develop new ways to get more involved. Families can establish a homework hotline, volunteer on school planning and decision-making committees, help create family resource centers, serve as mentors, and even help patrol school grounds.

Use community resources

Activities sponsored by community and religious organizations provide opportunities for children and other family members to engage in positive social and learning experiences. Family-oriented community resources may include health care services, housing assistance, adult education, family literacy, and employment counseling. Families can reinforce their children's learning by going to libraries, museums, free concerts, and cultural fairs together.

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When parents and families get personally involved in education, their children do better in school and grow up to be more successful in life.

Sounds like common sense, doesn't it?

Yet parental involvement is one of the most overlooked aspects of American education today. The fact is, many parents don't realize how important it is to get involved in their children's learning. As one dad said when he began to read to his daughter every day and discovered that it improved her learning, "I never realized how much it would mean to her to hear me read." Other parents would like to be involved, but have trouble finding the time.

All parents and family members should try to find the time and make the effort because research shows that when families get involved, their children:

- Get better grades and test scores.
- Graduate from high school at higher rates.
- Are more likely to go on to higher education.
- Are better behaved and have more positive attitudes.

Family involvement is also *one of the best investments* a family can make. Students who graduate from high school earn, on average, $200,000 more in their lifetimes than students who drop out. College graduates make almost $1 million more!

Most important of all, *ALL* parents and families can enjoy these benefits. It doesn't matter how much money you have. It doesn't matter how much formal education you've had yourself or how well you did in school. And family involvement works for children at all grade levels.

What is "Family Involvement in Education"?

It's a lot of different types of activities. Some parents and families may have the time to get involved in many ways. Others may only have the time for one or two activities. But whatever your level of involvement, remember: *If you get involved and stay involved, you can make a world of difference.*

Family involvement in education can mean: *Reading a bedtime story to your preschoool child...checking homework every night...getting involved in PTA... discussing your children's progress with teachers...voting in school board elections...helping your school to set challenging academic standards...limiting TV viewing to no more than two hours on school nights...getting personally involved in governing your school...becoming an advocate for better education in your community and state... and insisting on high standards of behavior for children.*

Or, family involvement can be as simple as asking your children, "How was school today?" But ask every day. That will send your children the clear message that *their schoolwork is important to you and you expect them to learn.*

Many children and parents are yearning for this kind of togetherness these days. Among students aged 10 to 13, for example, 72 percent say they would like to talk to their parents more about their homework. Forty percent of parents across the country believe that they are not devoting enough time to their children's education. And teachers say that increasing parental involvement in education should be the number one priority for public education in the next few years.

"Parents who know their children's teachers and help with the homework and teach their kids right from wrong —these parents can make all the difference."

— President Bill Clinton
State of the Union Address

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600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-8173

When you contact us, ask to receive a copy of the helpful booklet, *Preparing Your Child for College.*

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GET INVOLVED!

How Parents and Families Can Help Their Children Do Better in School

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TEAM UP FOR KIDS!

How Schools Can Support Family Involvement in Education

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PARTNERS IN LEARNING: HOW SCHOOLS CAN SUPPORT FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Learn to communicate better

At times, parents feel that educators talk down to them or speak in educational jargon they do not understand. School signs often seem unwelcoming. Schools should make every effort to reach out and communicate with parents in a clear way and listen to what they have to say. To ensure that all parents have access to information, written material should be concise and easily readable. Schools should be parent-friendly. Some school newsletters for parents include a glossary of terms to help parents understand school improvement efforts. Other schools use regularly scheduled telephone calls to stay in contact with families.

Encourage parental participation in school improvement efforts

When schools develop improvement plans, families ought to be included at every stage of the process to get their input and to give them a sense of shared responsibility. Many schools, supported by the new Goals 2000: Educate America Act, are now developing such plans. They are working to raise academic standards, improve teaching, make schools safer, introduce computers and other learning technologies into the classroom, and to make many other vitally needed changes. The full involvement of parents and other members of the community is instrumental to the success of these efforts.

Involve parents in decision-making

Schools can give parents a more effective voice by opening up the school governance process so that more parents can participate. Many schools hold evening and weekend meetings and conferences to accommodate families' work schedules.

Give teachers the tools to reach out to families

Staff development can help teachers to understand the benefits of family involvement and show them how to remove barriers to involvement. It can also explain techniques for improving two-way communication between home and school, and suggest ways to help meet families' overall educational needs.

Make parents feel welcome

Often the first time a parent comes to school is when a child is in trouble. Schools can help reduce tensions by making initial contacts with parents friendly and respectful. Schools can also reduce distrust by arranging contacts in neutral settings off school grounds. Home visits by family liaison personnel can be particularly helpful. Some programs have used home-school coordinators to run weekly clubs for parents, helping to build parenting skills and trust between families and schools. Schools might also encourage parents, teachers, and students to meet at the beginning of the school year to agree on goals and develop a common understanding.

Overcome language barriers

Reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special accommodations. Translating materials into a parent's first language helps, but written communication alone is not enough. Ideally, a resource person, perhaps another parent, should be available to communicate with parents in their first language. Interactive telephone voice-mail systems that have bilingual recordings for families are also useful. In addition, English-as-a-second-language classes for parents and grandparents may be helpful.

Use technology to link parents to the classroom

Educators can creatively use new technology—from voice-mail to homework hotlines to educational CD-ROM programs—to get parents more involved in the learning process. For example, voice mail systems have been installed in several hundred schools across the country. Parents and students can call for taped messages that describe classroom activities and daily homework assignments. Audiotapes and videotapes can also be used to enhance communication with parents. These are especially helpful in reaching family members who do not read. Even with all the new technology, teachers and other school staff can still use the old telephone to connect with parents. Schools can help by providing teachers with classroom phones.

Encourage communities to join school-family partnerships

This can be especially effective in reducing school safety problems that are connected to problems in surrounding neighborhoods. Parents, community residents, and law enforcement officials can help by joining together in voluntary organizations, friendship networks, and neighborhood watches to solve common problems. Schools and community and religious organizations can help by offering after-school cultural and recreational activities. Community-supported student services have also succeeded when families, schools, and community representatives have made the effort to get involved.

THE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT NATIONAL EDUCATION GOAL

"We believe that strengthening the connection between families and schools is so important that we have made it one of America's National Education Goals. The Goal declares that by the year 2000, 'Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.'"

— Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education

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WHEN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES TEAM UP TO HELP CHILDREN LEARN, EVERYONE WINS!

In Houston, Tex., administrators from Robert E. Lee High School went to their students' homes and sat on stoops with family members to "cut contracts" with parents, enlisting their help in the effort to reduce school violence. The result: A safer school and steadily rising test scores.

In Murfreesboro, Tenn., schools stay open until 6 p.m. to allow parents to work without worry, knowing their children are involved in constructive activities.

At the Sterne Brunson Elementary School in Benton Harbor, Mich., parents help teachers and administrators by working as classroom aides and office support staff.

And in New York City, teachers link the classroom to the home by operating a telephone homework hotline that students or parents can dial in the evening to get help with assignments.

These are but a few examples of the many ways schools are encouraging greater family involvement in education. They're discovering that school-family partnerships are an important way to help children learn and a great way for schools and families to help each other.

School-family partnerships: Enjoying the benefits, overcoming the barriers

Despite the many advantages of partnerships, schools and families remain disconnected in too many communities. There are many reasons why schools and families fail to join forces. Sometimes parents say they don't feel welcome at school. Often, work schedules and other time constraints, language barriers, or the sheer drag of daily life get in the way. And sometimes parents who didn't like school when they were students are reluctant to get involved again as adults.

On the other side of the coin, too many schools don't put out the welcome mat for their students' families or simply overlook the great value of getting families involved. Here's what can be done:

- *Schools can encourage and support greater family involvement in education.* Research shows that when families take an active, direct role in their children's education, children get better grades and test scores, graduate from high school at higher rates, have greater enrollment in higher education, and are better behaved and have more positive attitudes. Greater family involvement in education also has been shown to improve teacher morale and job satisfaction.

- *Schools should be places where families feel welcome and valued.* School programs that encourage greater parental involvement are more important than any other factor in determining whether or not parents actually do get involved. Some schools make a special effort to help low-income families get involved because many of these families wait for the school to approach them.

- *Parents and families can support their schools and play their part at home.* Parental involvement can take many forms, including getting involved in PTA activities; discussing children's progress with teachers on a regular basis; checking homework every night; reading to preschoolers; and encouraging students to take the challenging courses.

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— President Bill Clinton
State of the Union Address

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TEAM UP FOR KIDS!

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